The Business Of War

A Review Of Rodrigo Ximénez de Rada's *Minor Histories*
As translated and edited by Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi

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This is an important book in understanding not only how the Christian Church in what has been termed Medieval Europe shaped European history; how Christianity itself, as described in the Greek texts of the Gospels attributed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, came to be interpreted, but also how ancient Rome, and peoples such as the Ostrogoths and Arabs, were perceived.

In his Introduction, Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, the translator and a Syria-based, Oxford-educated medieval historian, sets the scene by quoting Rodrigo:

> "And thus it was that by the grace of God Almighty, who through His will alone arranged everything, no sedition or disturbance that could impede the business of war came about, although temptation arose quite often through the enemy of the human race."

The themes of war, violence, patriarchy and power dominate Rodrigo's account, as exemplified in the following:

> "After Theodoric died, the Ostrogoths elected his grandson Amaleric to be their ruler, but after a short time he came to the end of his life in Spain. After this Amaleric, the Ostrogoths then elected Theudis with Amalasuintha's consent, but, since Theudis strangled Amalasuintha in the bath a few days after his election, the Ostrogoths elected another king called Gutis. Elevated to the supreme position of royal power, this Gutis went to Ravenna and violently snatched away and married the daughter of King Euric and Queen Amalasuintha. Her grandfather Theodoric had left her there.
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> When Belesarius invaded Naples and wiped out the Goths who were there along with the city's inhabitants, he came to Rome and wanted to similarly put the Goths who were living there to the sword, but those of them who could flee reached Gutis in Ravenna. When Gutis came to know of such developments, he immediately came to Rome with a large army to face off against Belesarius."

The section titled *History of the Arabs* continue the themes which are vividly brought to life by the translator whose copious notes, and Introduction, provide the necessary context. As does the following passage which in my fallible opinion reveals how a medieval interpretation of Christianity affected life in those times:

> "As far as was possible, I explained in previous sections what losses Spain endured in the heaps of her calamities; now, if the divine power should henceforth wish to protect these lands from being cut up by swords- men, I have decided to place a suitable end concerning the ravages of the Arabs, which I hope should be the last, since nothing was unattempted by the Arabs in the Spanish lands. Indeed, for more than years this land has been cut apart repeatedly by their sword and has not escaped the division of her vitals at the hands of their descendants. When this land was also divided between the five kings, she did not escape the

> torments of her internal wound that was inflicted by these Arabs and those who deserted to the Saracens.
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> But now that divine clemency has been showing compassion since the time of the noble Alfonso, who routed the Amiramomenin and the Arabs in a battle on the plain near Vilches, the blunting of the Arabs' sword and the restoration of the Goths' strength have opened up ways for the Christians to retaliate. Just as from the beginning the Arabs oppressed the Christian inhabitants under the burden of tribute, so also the Arabs currently live in ordinary servitude while paying tribute, now that the fortifications have been restored to the Christian leaders' control."

Rodrigo Ximénez de Rada's *Minor Histories* as translated and edited by Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi is a reminder of how, again in my fallible opinion, we humans have failed to learn from our history. A history where war, conflict, violence, patriarchy and lust for power dominated and which themes apparently still dominate most governments and their acolytes around the world.

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